

APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

2013 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: Share Our Strength's Cooking Matters

Application ID: 13ED147080

Program Name: Share Out Strength's Cooking Matters AmeriCorps Program

For the purpose of enhancing our programs by improving the quality and quantity of applications to the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), we are providing specific feedback regarding the strengths and weaknesses of this application. These comments are not meant to represent a comprehensive assessment; rather the analysis represents those elements that had the greatest bearing on the rating of the application. Please note that this feedback consists of summary comments from more than one reviewer. For this reason, some of the comments may seem to be inconsistent or contradictory. Comments are not representative of all of the information used in the final funding decision.

Reviewers' Summary Comments:

(+) The evidence provided from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is persuasive; 48.8 million Americans live in households with food insecurity. This project will address food insecurity in low income households in 29 states, and will serve with 33 partner organization whose missions align with those of the applicant (food insecurity). Six of these partners are located in seven states defined by the USDA as having above average food insecurity. All the partner organizations and the applicant will target populations that are already eligible for other food programs such as Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and food stamps.

(+) The communities targeted are described, and their characteristics of poverty. The applicant explains the needs and the lacks of their targeted populations. They detail the effects of food insecurity on families and children, the actual difficulties low-income families experience providing proper nutrition. Their knowledge of the population informs them concerning the remedies they will employ to help provide education and food security to low-income families nationwide.

(+) The applicant explains a strong process for selecting the target population. They will conduct outreach through their 33 partners that serve low-income families. This process finds the families enrolled in food assistance programs.

(+) The applicant describes AmeriCorps member activities, roles and/or responsibilities clearly and provides specific examples. Members will provide direct client services at 33 agencies in 29 states by teaching families key food shopping and preparation skills and nutrition education. Members will also recruit and train volunteers to assist in these activities and coordinate nutrition education programs. The applicant's utilization of Members in a widespread geographical area is well planned and creative. The staffing plan paired with the additional volunteers will support the proposed goals of the project.

(+) The applicant has had previous AmeriCorps projects and has studied the results of those so they can better serve target communities now.

(+) The applicant exceeds average expectations by describing the functions of linked programs with complementary functions: to address referral needs to combat food security, to teach clientele to select and prepare healthy foods within their budgets are two such programs.

(+)The applicant, Cooking Matters, clearly describes a connected growth from serving over 5,000 course participants annually to serving over 23,000 course participants, in large part due to the support provided by AmeriCorps members who directly coordinate courses and build the volunteer base for programming.

(+) The applicant has clearly identified AmeriCorps members as playing a critical role in the planning and execution of Cooking Matters programming, serving with staff and clients, with growth of over 55% more participants than projected in the previous grant proposal period. The applicant also clearly identifies a strong partnership with 33 organizations throughout the country.

(+) The applicant offers a clear, detailed description of the ways the 50 of AmeriCorps members will use highly effective means to solve food insecurity problems strengthened by 33 partners' cadre of 15,750 additional volunteers. They propose to provide experiential nutrition-based education programming through hands-on cooking and practice shopping at the grocery stores to 27,000 low-income families in 29 states.

(+) Cooking Matters has clearly identified courses that are built around the framework of Social Cognitive Theory, that have been in place and in an expanding role in the community. Cooking Matters is also using a USDA Economic Research Service survey, pre- and post-course to identify success.

(+) Cooking Matters descriptively identifies surveys with testing by third party research partners including Colorado State University and the Gretchen Swanson Center for Nutrition. Expected improvement is 75% of graduates showing improvement in food resource management.

(+) The applicant describes how the proposed interventions will have a measurable community impact and explains the impact of the AmeriCorps investment, for instance, 30% of adult course participants are expected to report improved food security, 75% of graduates will show improvement in these food resource management behaviors and there will be an 86% graduation rate. In order to accurately measure services the applicant has put in place safeguards for assuring that data is collected in a timely and efficient manner, such as through a website created for partners to report tracking information within a two week time frame. In addition, a follow-up study of participants will be done during the grant cycle to assess if behavior changes are being sustained. This methodology clearly demonstrates a strong framework for success.

(+) The applicant provided a clear plan to measure the impact and how they determined their performance measure targets. An activity log, kept by each Lead Partners, will measure the number of individuals served, attending courses and tours through the Cooking Matters online database within two weeks of course or tour completion. The online database is continuously updated, ensuring collection of accurate and timely information.

(-) The applicant does not provide documentation of the extent/severity of the need in the target community. In order to determine the extent/severity of need more information is needed with regard to the percent of low-income families in the states where the project will focus. The applicant states the proposed number of targeted population is 27,000 across 29 states and that there are 48 million families needing these services nationally, but the only local

information provided is that, 22 partners are located in states with an average or above average food insecurity rate. This statement alone does not define severity of need.

(-) The applicant does not describe the overall change they expect to see and what demonstrable impact their program will have. The application lacks information on how the expected outcomes will result in community change across the geographical area of 29 states.